ELDERBERRY ARCHIVES

BY ZERBYTRON

A SERIES FOR ALL AGES ABOUT TWO GRANDPAS NAMED JOHN AND GEORGE, ALONG WITH THEIR PURPLE MONKEY FRIEND NAMED PEANUT AND THE GRUMPY HENRY.

ARCHIVE #1: THE FLYING GUMBO BICYCLE

In the quiet town of Willowbrook, the morning sun stretched across the windows of Grandpa John's dining room. He sat comfortably at the table, cradling a warm mug of hot cocoa in both hands, savoring the peaceful start to his day. Outside, birds chirped, the breeze whispered through the trees, and everything felt just right.

That peace lasted exactly three seconds.

Suddenly, the front door burst open with a loud bang.

"JOHN!" shouted Grandpa George as he stomped in, covered in leaves and excitement. "I'VE GOT THE GREATEST IDEA EVER!"

John was slightly startled. He calmly held his cocoa, intrigued but cautious. "And what would that be, George?"

George beamed. "I'm glad you asked. We're going to build a flying gumbo-powered bicycle!"

John, who was in the middle of sipping his cocoa, nearly inhaled it the wrong way. He coughed, sputtered, and barely managed to set the mug down before wiping his mouth. "A… what now?!"

George nodded proudly. "A flying. Gumbo-powered. Bicycle."

John stared at him, then glanced toward the hallway just as Peanut the purple monkey quietly appeared. Peanut wore his usual neon green aviator goggles and held up a small sign that read:

"IS THIS ANOTHER ONE OF HIS IDEAS?"

John sighed deeply. "Yes. Yes, it is."

Before John could protest further, George grabbed his arm and ushered both him and Peanut toward the garage. "Come on! I already finished it!"

"You what?" John muttered as they were dragged along. "I thought you said we were building it!"

The garage door creaked open and there it stood.

John froze.

The bicycle was… something.

It was painted in an eye-watering mix of neon green, orange, pink, and purple. Cardboard wings flopped loosely from either side. A wobbly propeller sat awkwardly at the front. And mounted at the back was an iron cauldron filled with a thick, bubbling, suspiciously ancient gumbo.

A smell hit John like a wall.

He staggered back, fanning the air wildly. “Good grief! What is that smell?!”

George inhaled deeply, slowly, like someone appreciating fine perfume. “Ahhh… Smells like adventure. You said something about jelly?”

“No!” John gagged. “I smell something terrible!”

George smiled dreamily. “That’s the gumbo. Aged one hundred years. Found it in a basement.”

Peanut immediately clamped a wooden clothespin onto his nose and scribbled furiously on a sign:

“THAT SMELLS HORRIBLE!!!”

John pointed at Peanut. “Finally, someone with sense!”

George waved them off. “You two just don’t understand innovation.”

Peanut shook his head firmly.

Despite all logic, George wheeled the bizarre machine out onto the road. John followed reluctantly, holding his nose, while Peanut trudged along behind them, sign in hand and goggles slightly fogged.

John looked up at the sky and sighed. “Well… I suppose we’re heading for the clouds now.”

George perked up. “WHAT?! We’re going to look like clowns now?”

“No, clouds!” John corrected him.

George nodded enthusiastically. “Yes, yes, clouds! That’s what I said!”

John muttered, “That’s not what you said.”

George hopped onto the bicycle. “Alright! Everyone ready?”

John hesitated. Peanut held up a sign:

“NO.”

George grinned anyway. “Excellent! Let’s go!”

They began pedaling.

At first, nothing happened.

Then the gumbo in the cauldron bubbled violently. The propeller sputtered to life. The cardboard wings flapped erratically.

And suddenly, up they went.

The bicycle lifted off the ground, wobbling wildly as it climbed into the sky.

John clung tightly to the handlebars. “I cannot believe this is working!”

Peanut held up a new sign, flapping in the wind:

“I CAN.”

Meanwhile, down on Benton Street, Henry sat inside his beloved dumpster, sipping from a jar of pickle juice and reading a discarded newspaper.

Henry was a puppet with yellow-green fur, a permanent scowl, and a surprisingly strong knowing between right and wrong.

He grumbled as he flipped through the pages. “Negative news… boring stories… fake celebrities… lousy leaders… and this comic is terrible.”

He sighed and prepared to crumple the paper when a headline caught his eye:

“Two Grandpas and a Purple Monkey Spotted on Flying Neon Disaster Over Willowbrook”

Henry stared.

Then he let out a sharp, disbelieving laugh. “Oh, sure. Why not? That’s the most ridiculous thing I’ve heard!”

He crumpled it anyway. “Is there anything good to read anymore? Not that it matters. Nobody reads the paper at this point.”

Above him, the flying bicycle began to shake violently. The propeller sputtered, the wings bent, and the gumbo sloshed dangerously.

John’s eyes widened. “George, I don’t think this thing is stable!”

George leaned in. “WHAT?! You think it’s a seat at a table?”

“No, I said — oh never mind!” John groaned.

The bicycle tilted sharply, then it dropped fast.

“WE’RE GOING DOWN!” John shouted.

Peanut held up a sign:

“I KNEW IT!”

They plummeted straight toward Benton Street and crashed directly into Henry’s dumpster.

The impact was tremendous.

The cauldron flipped and gumbo exploded everywhere. It splattered the dumpster, the alley, the walls, and Henry.

Henry stood frozen for one second.

Then he screamed. “AAAUGH!!! MY PERFECTLY STINKY DUMPSTER!!!”

John poked his head up, dripping with gumbo. “I am so, so sorry! This was not supposed to happen.”

Peanut held up a messy sign:

“WE APOLOGIZE.”

George climbed out, grinning. “Well, I’d say that worked out nicely. The idea was garbage, and the landing spot is perfect!”

John stared at him. “George, this was your idea.”

George blinked. “WHAT?! You said it was a great idea? Why, thank you, John! That’s a very kind thing to say!”

“That is not what I said!” John snapped.

Henry, now furious, reached into a crate and pulled out three ripe tomatoes. “SCRAM!!!”

He hurled the first tomato. It hit John square in the chest. The second flew at Peanut. Right on his face, sign and all. The third sailed toward George, who caught it.

George examined it thoughtfully, took a large bite, and chewed. His face scrunched up. “That’s aggressive. Wow. Could use some salt.”

John wiped his face and tried to clean his glasses. “That’s it. We’re leaving. Now.”

They scrambled out of the dumpster, covered in gumbo and tomato, and hurried away as fast as they could.

Behind them, Henry grumbled loudly while surveying the mess. He spent hours cleaning everything, eventually rinsing himself off with the alley hose, muttering the entire time.

Back at the house, John, George, and Peanut stood in the yard as the garden hose sprayed them clean. Gumbo washed away, tomato seeds slid off, and dignity slowly returned… a little.

John sighed, now in fresh clothes. “Next time, George, we stick to ideas that stay on the ground.”

George misheard. “WHAT?! We stick a clown to the ground?”

John closed his eyes. “I’m making more cocoa.”

Peanut held up one final sign:

“PLEASE DO.”